

*Includes provisions from Congressman's legislation to protect the School District of Philadelphia's unique method for providing free meals, while opening it up to other school districts around the country*

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□ June 10, 2010

**WASHINGTON, DC-** House legislation introduced today to reauthorize childhood nutrition programs includes a measure worked into the bill by Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) to make permanent Philadelphia's effective school lunch program. The School District of Philadelphia (SDOP) has faced elimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) despite its proven effectiveness in ensuring that students in need receive free meals. Congressman Sestak's legislation, which he introduced separately as the School Meal Enhancement Act, would have the program continue as he and other members of the Philadelphia area's congressional delegation have advocated, and would begin allowing other qualifying school district across the country access to the same system that Philadelphia uses to determine eligibility for free meals.

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**"I am pleased with the inclusion of provisions that, as I understand them, allow the Philadelphia School District to continue with their landmark program, provide a more permanent authorization for the program, and allow other school districts to join them in using this cost-effective and efficient method of providing free school meals," said Congressman Sestak. "I look forward to continuing to work with Chairman Miller to**

**ensure this language effectively promotes this common sense technique and to secure passage of this bill."**

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**The larger bill, the "Improving Nutrition for America's Children Act," was announced by Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller to reauthorize childhood nutrition programs and make key advancements toward ending childhood hunger by improving the quality of meals children eat both in and out of school and in child care settings, supporting community efforts to reduce childhood hunger and, for the first time, establishing nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools.**

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**Congressman Sestak has been a staunch supporter of continuing and expanding Philadelphia's program after, in 2008, the USDA announced that it planned on ending the successful application-less Universal Feeding pilot program at the SDOP following the 2009-2010 school year. Under the methods used in Philadelphia, a socio-demographic survey establishes the approximate eligibility rates at select schools where a large percentage of the students would be eligible. The SDOP then offers every student at those schools free meals and the USDA reimburses the SDOP at the rate determined by the survey. The SDOP covers the cost for the remaining meals and is able to provide free lunches to all students in more than 100 of the District's schools.**

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**"At a time when more than 16 percent of our children are obese and almost 78,000 children in Philadelphia alone live in households that do not provide them with access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle, we must build upon the success of Philadelphia's program," said Congressman Sestak. "As the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PADED) has rightly pointed out, 'elimination of the Universal Feeding program in the School District of Philadelphia will not benefit USDA, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, or the city of Philadelphia, but most of all, it will not benefit the children who depend upon the school district as the source, and sometimes their only source, of**

one of the basic necessities of life, which is food.”

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The program removes a paper application process that USDA has long acknowledged has significant problems. For example, not all students return forms -- especially those from economically challenged families -- and others students that are eligible do not participate because of the stigma attached to receiving a free lunch. The net cost in Philadelphia has been negligible as expenses for the survey and non-reimbursed meals have been offset by the savings from ending the paper application process.

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Additionally, the SDOP is able reduce the cost of lunch per student by building upon economies of scale by expanding the number of students eating school meals. Any increase in cost to the USDA was due to the system being more effective at covering more eligible students, which should be a demonstration of success for the program.

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This method can also be more effective than the other alternative by which school districts receive free meals based on the number of families on food stamps because in many areas, a large number of qualifying families do not use food stamps.

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The bill announced today would begin expanding the socioeconomic survey option by allowing three new districts to join for a three year trial. After three years in the program, it would be determined if the program was successful enough in those districts to be continued permanently and other districts would take their place in the trial.□

**The bill also includes new authority to use socio-economic data to determine the number of students in a school eligible for federally supported free meals and allowing school districts to dispense with costly and ineffective applications and provide free lunches to the students of the school – a practice used successfully by the School District of Philadelphia (SDOP) since 1991.**

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*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University.□ According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*